

Statement of

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to address you today to discuss the impact of and U.S. response to the South Asia earthquake.

DoD Overseas Humanitarian Assistance Responsibilities

The Department of Defense response to this tragic earthquake, as well as other disasters around the globe, is always in support of a larger Federal government response. The current effort in Pakistan is lead by the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) in coordination with the U.S. Department of State and the National Security Council. For the Pakistan earthquake, the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team and the DoD Humanitarian Operations Military Office immediately exchanged liaison team members to ensure close civil-military cooperation.

DoD support to Pakistan has enabled unique military capabilities to be used where required. For example, the Department of Defense has provided logistics support, including air traffic control; airport cargo management; and air and seaborne transportation; as well as imaging support, heavy engineering equipment, and medical support and supplies.

Initial Response

Based on requirements compiled by USAID and the State Department, we initiated planning immediately and within 48 hours of the earthquake, the Department of Defense took the following actions:

- The United States Central Command immediately directed the Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan, under Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, to lead the initial U.S. military response.
- On October 10th, Lieutenant General Eikenberry traveled to the affected region and assessed humanitarian relief requirements. Then, Rear Admiral Michael LeFever, U.S. Navy, arrived to establish a Humanitarian Operations Military Office to help coordinate military support with the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad.
- A C-17 carrying meals ready to eat (MRE), blankets, water, a 10-ton forklift, and cargo processing personnel, dispatched to assess airfield capacity, landed in Islamabad on October 10th. With the C-17 on the ground, four additional aircraft carrying more relief supplies and an air traffic control unit (Contingency Response Group) were headed to Pakistan.
- Eight helicopters were deployed from Afghanistan to Islamabad on October 10th and began transporting humanitarian relief supplies and personnel. The next day, those same helicopters were evacuating victims of the earthquake.

DoD's ability to quickly respond to this disaster is a reflection of our force availability in the region and a testament to our close working relations with Pakistan and our civilian U.S. government colleagues. Recognizing that further aid would be required, we began the process of drawing personnel and equipment from around the world.

Current Situation

The U.S. military continues to fully coordinate its relief operations with the Pakistani Government in conjunction with the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad. As of October 20th, 391 U.S. personnel and 12 helicopters are supporting relief operations in Pakistan, with 19 additional helicopters arriving in the next few days. To date, U.S. helicopters have completed 279 sorties; delivered 625 short tons of humanitarian relief; and evacuated 3,778 personnel. 51 airlift missions have also arrived with 246 tents; 1,920 cots; 6,000 blankets; 153,600 meals; 32 tons of medical supplies; and 1,039 short tons of cargo. Additionally, the U.S.S. PEARL HARBOR and MV NORTHERN LIGHTS have arrived and offloaded 32 pieces of engineering equipment to assist road repair and reconstruction.

We must also note the exceptional performance of the Pakistani Army and Air Forces during this crisis. The principal burden of dealing with the relief effort has fallen on the Pakistani military. Pakistani military forces have effectively managed a relief system that has moved a significant amount of humanitarian assistance, along with rescue teams, medical personnel and crisis managers into some of the most unforgiving terrain in the world. Many soldiers and airmen of the Pakistani military have lost both comrades and family members in the earthquake, but their commitment to duty has been unwavering. Their dedication to their country despite their own personal loss is to be commended.

Our friendship with the Pakistanis has been enduring and our support and aid to our friends continues in their time of need. Pakistan has been a close ally and an essential partner in the Global War on Terror. President Musharraf and the Government of Pakistan have been extremely active in the campaign against international terrorism. They have captured key Al Qaeda and Taliban militants, expanded Pakistani military presence in the tribal areas, and continue to provide support to Coalition forces operating in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, the Department of Defense is gratified that we are able to participate in this lifesaving operation and to be able to assist the people of Pakistan in their time of great need. The men and women of the U.S. military have once again answered the call and we are all extremely proud of their service. I welcome any questions you may have.